

# Home Heating Assistance: Winter 2005/06

A fact sheet from the Indiana Office of Utility Consumer Counselor

High natural gas prices will continue to affect consumers nationwide this winter, including consumers in Indiana. The Indiana Office of Utility Consumer Counselor (OUCC) has produced this fact sheet to provide a brief outline of options that may help in dealing with continued high energy costs.

All consumers can benefit from:

- Payment plans – If, at any time, you realize you will have trouble paying a specific bill, contact the utility immediately. Utilities may make payment arrangements, but the consumer is responsible for contacting the company.
- Budget billing – Available from most natural gas and electric utilities in Indiana, to provide consistent payments from month to month. Individual utilities can provide consumers with specific information on their respective programs.
- Energy efficiency improvements – More information is available from the OUCC fact sheet, “Reduce Your Winter Energy Bills.” Some homeowners who make efficiency improvements may qualify for state income tax deductions. Income-eligible consumers may also qualify for weatherization help from their utilities.

While the OUCC does not offer financial assistance, income-eligible households can receive help from several sources:

- Community Action Agencies – For participation in Indiana’s Energy Assistance Program (EAP); eligibility this winter has been extended to families with incomes at or below 150% of the federal poverty guidelines. To find your local Community Action Agency, call 1-800-622-4973.
- The Help Thy Neighbor fund – Available to assist households with incomes between 150% and 200% of federal poverty guidelines that have received disconnection notices. This new assistance program has received funding from Lilly Endowment, the state’s major natural gas utilities, and individual contributions. Consumers who believe they qualify can learn more from their local utilities or from [www.heatingfund.org](http://www.heatingfund.org).
- Utilities – For payment arrangements and heating assistance through their respective charitable organizations.
- Township trustees, local charities and churches – For possible additional assistance.

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In addition, two pilot programs offered by the state's major natural gas utilities offer additional assistance for income-eligible customers:

- The Universal Service Program for Citizens Gas and Vectren customers – A two-year pilot program that continues through December 2006. Customers participating in the state Energy Assistance Program receive additional bill reductions through this program. The program also offers funding for weatherization assistance.
- The Winter Warmth Program for Northern Indiana Public Service Company (NIPSCO) customers – This program is set to continue through December 2006. It offers additional assistance to state Energy Assistance Program participants and to households facing “temporary hardship” as determined by participating social service agencies throughout northern Indiana.

For more details on the Universal Service and Winter Warmth programs, including questions about eligibility, please contact your utility service provider:

- Citizens Gas: (317) 924-3311
- NIPSCO: 1-800-464-7726
- Vectren: 1-800-227-1376

For more information on utility issues – including utility service disconnection and Lifeline/Link-Up telephone assistance for qualifying consumers – please visit the OUCS Website or call us toll-free at 1-888-441-2494.

The Indiana Office of Utility Consumer Counselor (OUCC) is the state agency representing the interests of utility consumers and the general public in matters related to the provision of utility services. The OUCC is active in proceedings before regulatory and legal bodies and is committed to giving consumers a voice in the creation of utility service policy.

OpenLines publications are produced by the OUCC to educate consumers on their rights and responsibilities regarding utility services. All OpenLines publications, including a comprehensive telecommunications consumer handbook and fact sheets on various utility topics, are available at no cost on the OUCC Web site or by calling the OUCC Consumer Services Staff.



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